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US First-Year Composition and Writing in the Disciplines

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Abstract

The issue of how to help university students write more effectively has been a concern since the establishment of the first writing courses in the USA over 140 years ago. University teachers generally acknowledge that writing instruction is important, and a first-year academic writing course — called composition at most American universities and colleges — is required of almost all US students. However, there is considerable debate about how and what sort of writing should be taught, given differences in writing needs across the disciplines and professions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, students were assigned to write about fairly general topics that involved little outside research, because the "themes" or "compositions", as they were called, were considered mere exercises, with instruction focusing on grammatical correctness, and the goal being "to bring all this heterogeneous class of young men, by constant training from October till June to the point where they can write English of which they need not be ashamed" (Copeland and Rideout 1901: 2). In the 1970s, with the growth of higher education and the entrance of more students from previously excluded groups, the writing in the disciplines (WID) movement was formed to encourage teaching staff across the curriculum to foster additional improvement in students' writing and, with it, their learning of content material and disciplinary methods.

Disciplines

Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | English Language and Literature | Higher Education | Rhetoric and Composition | Technical and Professional Writing

Comments

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U.S. First-year Composition and Writing in the Disciplines

Introduction/definitions

The issue of how to help university students write more effectively has been a concern since the establishment of the first writing courses in the U.S. over 140 years ago. University teachers generally acknowledge that writing instruction is important, and a first-year academic writing course—called *composition* at most American universities and colleges—is required of almost all U.S. students. Yet there is considerable debate about how and what *sort* of writing should be taught, given differences in writing needs across the disciplines and professions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, students were assigned to write about fairly general topics that involved little outside research, because the "themes" or "compositions" as they were called, were considered mere exercises, with instruction focusing on grammatical correctness, and the goal being "to bring all this heterogeneous class of young men, by constant training from October till June to the point where they can write English of which they need not be ashamed" (Copeland and Rideout 2). In the 1970s, with the growth of higher education and the entrance of more students from previously excluded groups, the writing-in-the-disciplines movement was formed to encourage teaching staff across the curriculum to foster additional improvement in students' writing and, with it, their learning of content material and disciplinary methods.

However, in the context of this history, it is important to recognize that although the late 19th century university students were viewed as limited in their ability to write "appropriate" "academic" English, all of them were presumed to speak English as

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their primary language, whereas at present, an increasing number of International students from non-English speaking countries are enrolled in American Composition courses. Citing statistics from the Institute of International education, Open Doors, 2004, Paul Kei Matsuda notes that in the academic year 2003/2004, there were 572,509 international students in the United States, "most of whom came from countries where English is not the dominant language" (Matsuda 639). This burgeoning population of students from all over the world who intend to use English in academic and professional contexts has called attention to the developing field of English Language Studies and to the lack of attention afforded to the needs of these students by Composition scholars.

It is important to notice that in the U.S., there is a very widespread effort to teach English as a second or other language at the university level. This has had a vibrant research tradition, linked of course to international efforts, and represented by the organization TESOL. In the vast majority of US universities, TESOL programs are not linked formally to composition or WAC programs, though there are many points of contact. These contacts have been strengthened in recent years by the committees in the respective professional associations and by research on "L2 composition" and Transnational Composition (see Horner's chapter)

This chapter introduces the U.S. first year composition course (as the ubiquitous course in academic writing came to be called, as well as the profession that later developed around it) and writing-across-the curriculum (also called writing-in-the-disciplines) programs, or WAC/WiD. It addresses several issues associated with the teaching of

academic writing and the considerable research into these issues over the last 50 years. Issues include the characteristics of academic writing, the extent those characteristics are shared across disciplines, whether they transfer from general writing courses to disciplinary courses or across disciplines, and the ethics of teaching to students from other languages, cultures and academic backgrounds versions of academic writing that have long been associated with elitist, middle-class identities and values.

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It is important to contextualize these two US traditions globally in terms of English Language Studies. Some universities around the world have specific courses in writing required of all or many students in the mother tongue, and even some education systems have such a requirement. France has its course in "expression ecrit," for example, as does Belgium. But Anglophone universities outside the US have generally not had such required courses for students who speak English as a mother tongue (though some specific universities do, such as the Massey University, New Zealand). In universities outside the US where English is the dominant language of instruction but many or most students do not speak English as a first language, English as a Foreign Language courses may be required of students who do not meet a certain standard, and these courses may focus on academic writing. Traditions such as ESL (EAP) are more important than that of US Composition. Recently some universities most students do not speak English as a first language have begun a required first-year course in academic writing for all students (e.g., Hong Kong City University). Finally we should note that there have since World War II been many "American universities" founded (e.g., in the Middle East), with more recently, and these tend to have US-style required composition courses.

In terms of WAC/WiD globally, it's important to note again the presence of efforts to support and encourage university teachers in the disciplines to attend to students' writing at the service of their disciplinary learning. Some of these have been influenced somewhat by US WAC/WiD, such as Thinking Writing at Queen Mary University of London (Mitchell), University of Buenos Aires (Carlino), or Massey University (Emerson), but which have a very much local and national system orientation and approach. Other efforts have grown up without US influence, such as efforts at the Université Libre de Bruxels (Pollet) or the very large efforts in Australia inspired by Systemic Functional Linguistics (Skillen), associated with the national organization for student support units.[1]

As we shall note in passing, the US tradition of "writing centers"—student support units emphasizing individual support for student writing—have long been associated with composition courses or WAC/WiD. These efforts have also become a feature globally (E.g., Coventry University in the UK (Ganobsoch-Wiliams)). There are now writing center associations in Europe and the Middle East, for example, and centers formed in Latin America (see for example *Aneth-Gomez). Again, this US tradition must by seen in terms of efforts the larger—and usually unrelated—traditions of student support units that have as all or part of their brief improving students' English language skill, most notably their academic writing.

Composition

[1] Indeed, the "Cornell model" of WiD had grant funding in the 2000s for international outreach.

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Since the 1870s, first year writing courses have been required for almost all, undergraduate students at American universities. Since the requirement was first instituted at Harvard in 1875, most composition courses were called "Freshman English" or "English Composition," but now, the course may have many different titles, such as "University Writing," "Writing and Critical Reasoning," or "Writing and Rhetoric." It is usually a two-semester course, though many students "test out" of one semester.

Each university has, typically, one or two composition courses required of all students, divided into "sections" of less than 20 to more than 30 students per section, depending on the institution. In 2011, over five million students were enrolled in some form of a first year writing course, in some two hundred thousand sections. Administering the course is a serious challenge, raising issues of funding, staffing, assessment, and teacher preparation. The course is usually administered through the English Department, although at some institutions, it may be a component of a separate department of writing or writing studies. Composition may also be connected to or affiliated with a writing center or some form of supplemental instruction in which "tutors"[2] (often upper level undergraduate students or graduate students) work individual or in small groups with students to provide additional instruction.

Most of the sections are taught by temporary or part-time teaching staff, including graduate students at institutions where graduate degrees are offered (mostly in literary

[2] Note that "tutor" in US usage not the regular teacher of a course, as in the UK, but rather a person who provides supplemental instruction, usually on an individual basis.

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studies). At most institutions all the permanent teaching staff in English also teach at least one section. But at research-focused institutions with graduate programs in English, permanent (tenure-line) teachers rarely teach it, although the course funds the graduate students in literary studies. Preparation varies considerably. At some universities, graduate work in Composition theory and pedagogy may be required for graduate students who teach the first year writing course, whereas at others, the course is taught by part-time instructors who may hold a Master's or Ph.D. degree in English, although frequently they specialize in literature, or sometimes creative writing, not in Composition. These instructors may have little training in or understanding of what is involved in teaching writing; yet writing program directors are often expected to prepare these people in a matter of a few days. Sometimes, given the pressures of staffing classes, these instructors are simply handed a syllabus and a textbook without any formal training at all.

Nevertheless, despite issues of preparation and staffing, Composition has developed into a serious scholarly discipline, with professional organizations, conferences, and journals that address the needs of composition teachers at various levels. The chief professional organization is the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), an arm of The National Council of Teachers of English, and there is an affiliated organization for teachers at two-year colleges. A separate organization for Writing Program Administrators (WPA) exists, as well. The major journals in the field include *College English*, *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), *WPA Journal*, *The Journal of Basic Writing*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, *English Education*, and *Teaching English in the Two Year College*.

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WAC/WiD

Institutionally, WAC has been focused in programs within individual universities (and some secondary schools). It is a higher education reform movement, but without a centralized national organization, though it does have a loosely organized special interest group associated with the CCCC and a website, The WAC Clearinghouse. Despite this, it has had wide influence in U.S. Higher Education over the last 30 years. In the US today, more than 50% of institutions of higher education have some program to improve student writing in the disciplines—and student learning through writing. Some 65% of Ph.D.-granting universities have such a program (Thaiss & Porter, 2011).

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Almost all WAC programs include organized efforts to develop awareness of writing among teachers in the disciplines and their competence in supporting students in their writing. From the beginning of WAC in the 1970s (and noted in US resarch since the 1980s, e.g., Fulwiler), there is a tendency for university teachers to see writing as

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someone else's responsibility, setting a cascade of blame (See Lillis this volume). This is a fundamental problem for WAC/WiD where there are separate "writing" courses or centers. Many institutions have interdisciplinary workshops and seminars for academic teaching staff from all disciplines on writing development. There they not only discuss the particular needs and resources for their students' writing but also how writing works differently in each of their disciplines, how it brings students to deeper involvement with the unique ways of knowing in each—the epistemology of each—and how students can be helped to write to learn as they learn to write in a field. Teaching staff learn to design and sequence assignments, communicate expectations, and give feedback (Bazerman et al 2005). And since 1993 there has been a biennial meeting, the International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, that draws about 500 faculty members from a great range of disciplines, institutions and countries.[3]

Many WAC programs also include some curricular structure(s) to provide continuity. Institutions or departments often designate certain courses as "writing intensive" or "writing extensive" and require students to take a certain one (or a certain number of them) to graduate. Other universities have "linked" courses in which some or all of the students in a course in a discipline take a parallel course in writing, which uses the content of the disciplinary course and is planned in conjunction with it. More rarely, departments organize a sequence of writing tasks and student support that extends

[3] Several other traditions in English Language Studies have carried out extensive programmatic interventions and research on cooperation with disciplinary teachers, such as the IDEALL approach in Australia (Skillen et al., 1998) and the Integrating Content and Language movement based in continental Europe and South Africa (Gustaffsen 2010). The Academic Literacies perspective from the UK emphasizes the need for such disciplinary focus and has recently enacted some efforts to do so (Russell et al, 2009)..[BRIAN, CORRECT ME IF I'M WRONG ON THIS. I KNOW TERESA HAS A NEW COLLECTION COMING OUT THAT CALLS FOR STUDIES OF PRACTICE. ANY ON DISICPLINARY STUFF?)

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throughout their curriculum, from first year to last, to consciously develop students' writing (and often other communication modes). Some universities have required all departments to develop such a sequence (Bazerman et al 2005). All these curricular forms are almost always in addition to first-year composition courses, though some universities require freshman "seminars" instead: a first-year writing course taught by staff in various disciplines with subjects for writing drawn from their disciplines (Monroe, ed. 2006).

Finally, WAC programs, like composition programs, are often connected with or part of a writing center or centers (often attached to a student support unit). Tutors (graduate or undergraduate students, typically) give individual or small group help to students. Sometimes tutors are drawn from various disciplines. Sometimes there are discipline-specific writing centers. And sometimes there are tutors assigned to specific courses (usually large lectures) to help students with their writing and learning. These centers have tried to avoid the remedial or deficit model of writing by helping all students with their writing—and, in some centers, even teaching staff who are writing research articles. And their International Writing Center Association provides support for new programs in the US mainly. (The European Writing Center Association and the Middle East – North Africa Writing Centers Alliance are very active internationally).

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Composition

The composition course was first established at Harvard as a result of a change in U.S. higher education from the old general rhetorical education emphasizing Latin and Greek to a new highly specialized education based on the German model—in the vernacular (Berlin 1984, Brereton 1995, Crowley 1998, Murphy 2001, among others). In 1874, an entrance exam was introduced, which featured a writing requirement, and when the

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English faculty received the results, they were apparently shocked by the profusion of error they noted—punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and syntax. The general writing skills course put in place soon spread to other colleges and universities. Initially, the focus of the course was primarily on correct usage and grammar, and for the first half of the 20th century, the writing that was done in the composition course was simply "assigned," then corrected and graded, perhaps accompanied by a brief evaluative comment.

Emphasis was on the "product" of writing, not the "process," and on general modes or text types (exposition, description, narration, argument) or literary appreciation rather than on the content of the students' specialized academic studies. This continued through the 1960's (and endures in many classrooms today) until a revival of interest in classical rhetoric in the 1960s inspired new theories of composition, which led to a focus on writing process and the beginnings of research on academic writing.

Information processing cognitive psychology influenced early studies of the writing process (as it was called), and yielded the insight that the composing process was recursive, rather than linear. Classroom practices of invention of ideas and revision became common. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Cognitive perspectives competed with "expressivist" or "romantic" approaches, which viewed writing as a means of personal development, enabling writers to discover their own "voice" (e.g., Peter Elbow 1973, Ken Macrorie 1970, and Donald Murray 1984).

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Cognitive and expressivist approaches were challenged in the mid-1980s by *social constructionist* perspectives (, which argued that writing is a social and communal act, and helping students improve as writers means enabling them to understand and act within social contexts of writing. Classroom practices such as collaborative learning, peer review and writing groups, became common

From the early nineties, cultural studies has been a significant curricular influence on FYC courses, with a focus on "the systemic, cultural injustices inflicted by dominant societal groups and dominant discourses on those with less power" (Fulkerson, 2005, p. 659) and the goal of empowering students to resist influences that keep some groups subordinate.

An Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition was adopted by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA, April 2000, amended 2008) in an attempt to achieve greater consistency in a course that was and is extremely varied, not only among institutions but also among individual teachers within institutions, as teachers—even graduate students—often have a comparatively high degree of autonomy. The WPA official statement of desired outcomes for the course privileges rhetoric-based literacy goals: Rhetorical Knowledge, Critical Thinking Reading and Writing, Processes, Knowledge of Conventions, and Composing in Electronic Environments, and the focus is clearly on academic writing as preparation for success in the disciplines.

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WAC/WiD

The rise of the WAC movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Russell, 2012) was a response to the influx into higher education of previously excluded groups, through open admissions policies in many public universities. One response was to radically rethink the remedial or deficit model of writing and for a focus instead by writing centers, special curricula, and systematic research into the differences between student and teacher perceptions. Another, related approach was to enlist teachers from other disciplines to improve students' writing—and learning: the WAC movement.

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A few institutions developed informal programs, usually workshops or retreats for teachers in the disciplines. A series of government and private grants in the 1980s disseminated these ideas nationally, as did the newly professionalized composition teachers, through the CCCC (specially the WAC Network).

The key idea is that students *write to learn* as well as learn to write—that writing has cognitive and developmental effects. It is not mere transcription of thought or speech requiring discrete skills. The early theoretical inspiration for WAC movement in the US came directly from a British educational theorist and reformer, James Britton, and his colleagues at the University of London Institute of Education, who coined the term WAC as part of their efforts to improve writing in the disciplines in *secondary* education. Britton and his colleagues (1975) viewed writing (and talk) as a gradually developing accomplishment, thoroughly bound up with the particular intellectual goals and traditions of each discipline or profession, not as a single set of readily-generalizable skills learned once and for all. They also theorized writing in terms of disciplinary learning and

personal development, not discrete, generalizable skills. And they used Vygotsky (among others) to theorize it. In Britain, the Language across the Curriculum or Language Awareness movements (as they were called) did not last long or have a great impact on secondary schools, and almost none in higher education at the time, but their ideas were picked up by the fledgling WAC movement in the US—mainly in higher education – and can now be found in the UK movement in academic literacies (Scott and Lillis, 2008).

WAC influenced general composition courses beginning in the 1980s. "WAC textbooks" in first-year composition courses began to appear, which taught the genres of writing in the social and natural sciences as well as literary analysis—not as formulas to be followed, ordinarily, but as indices of the ways of knowing, the epistemology and social actions, of knowledge domains or disciplines. And WAC became another variety of the first year composition course as well as an educational reform movement.

Critical issues and topics

Composition

When the first year composition course was first developed, its goal was to enable students to write correctly so as to enter and maintain membership in the academic community. Now, however, although correctness remains a value, scholars and teachers ponder more complex questions: What sort of writing should students be taught? To what extent do particular writing skills "transfer" to other writing venues? How can writing be assessed? And, most recently, how can new media be incorporated effectively into a writing course? Many writing programs, in accord with the WPA Outcomes statement, prioritize academic argument. However, composition research has not definitively

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established whether academic argument is useful for students when they write papers in upper division courses or assume a professional role. This question, which was raised by Petraglia's 1995 collection, *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction* about the value of general writing skills instruction (GWSI), remains pertinent.

Related to the issue of what sort of writing to teach is that of *how* particular academic genres should be taught. Over the past thirty-five years, work in rhetorical genre theory has deepened and expanded our understanding of genre. Derived from Carolyn Miller, rhetorical genre theory has reconceived the concept of genre not as a series of literary categories, but rather as a typified rhetorical response to a recurrent situation within a community. In this context, genres are defined not in terms of formal characteristics, but in terms of function, a view that has led to debates about how academic genres can most effectively be taught. Some scholars (Cope and Kalantzis, Johns) argue for teaching specific genres and genre features as a means of empowering marginalized students, a perspective represented by the Australian curriculum, which focuses on explicit instruction in specific genres. Some critics of this approach are concerned that it will result in rigid formalism and slavish imitation of a particular model, while others maintain that because genres can be learned only through situated immersion in the community in which the genre plays a role, explicit teaching of any genre is unlikely to be successful (see Freedman; Williams and Colomb). This issue is discussed further in the WAC/WID section of this chapter.

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Another issue that continues to perplex scholars and teachers concerns whether the teaching of academic writing, which is aligned with middle class and perhaps elitist values, constitutes a form of cultural colonization that may be alienating to students from working class homes or other cultures (cf Horner). Donna Le Court discusses the "classed nature of academic genres" (30), which she refers to as "the alienation narrative" (33) in which "working-class students succeed only if their class identity is stripped away in favor of a middle-class habitus" (31). Can people become proficient "academic" writers without "accepting the values they embody and thus the social hierarchies in which those genres participate" (Coe et al. p. 4)? The idea that higher education involves identity change leaves well-meaning composition teachers and theorists with contradictory pedagogical options and an ethical dilemma that has yet to be resolved.

Related to the issue of how to enable so called 'disadvantaged' students to acquire academic literacy is that of assessment. In the 1950's, writing assessment focused on objective testing, which was used primarily for placement in particular writing courses, followed by assessment that was based on essay tests that students wrote in a single sitting. In the late 1980's, reflecting concerns about the validity of timed writing and the recognition that most good writing is revised, portfolios became an increasingly common assessment tool (Yancey, 1999, p.485), and have remained a means of assessment that most composition teachers and theorists maintain is most valuable (see the CCCC Executive Committee on Writing Assessment: A Position Statement 2009). However, since the 1980's, colleges and universities have called for rigorous scientific assessment and bottom line affirmation that writing courses are 'effective'. To address these

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administrative concerns, external organizations such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) have developed tests to assess an institution's success with students' outcomes rather than to measure the learning of individual students (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2010). Nevertheless, although administrators may seize upon large-scale program assessment as a means of justifying expenditure, the validity and reliability of these tests continue to be called into question in composition scholarship.

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Another key issue with international resonance, and one that has gained importance in the last 10 years is attitudes toward language difference, and practices of teaching students who speak a language other than English as their first language(s). Paul Kei Matsuda in "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition" questions why issues of language difference have not been a central concern for people in Composition studies and postulates that it is due to what he refers to as the "myth of linguistic homogeneity"—that is "the tacit and widespread acceptance of the dominant image, of composition students as native speakers of a privileged variety of English" (638). Tracing the history of the myth of linguistic homogeneity, Matsuda maintains that "the ability to speak privileged varieties of English was often equated with the speaker's race and intelligence" (671). Moreover, although the emergence of the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition was oriented toward enabling previously marginalized groups of students to acquire effective academic literacy skills, Compositionists did not focus attention on issues of language difference., assuming that these were the province of

linguists and/ or assigning students to ESL writing courses, often taught by teachers with little background in the area.

More specifically, the presence of international students in US universities—almost all of whom are required to take composition courses, raises related issues on the particular expectations in FYC. Increasingly, instruction in English is included in the curricula of countries throughout the world, increasingly referred to as English Language Studies. However, agreement about the purpose of such instruction and the most effective way to accomplish that purpose has, as yet, to be achieved, as is highlighted in Fu and Matoush's recent discussion of teachers' perception of English language instruction in China. Fu and Matoush's essay notes that "English is taught in every school throughout the People's Republic of China" (23) but that "indigenous English language teachers" tend to view English writing "as a tool meant for limited functional mimetic use rather than as a vehicle for enabling full fledged empowered bilingual communicative competence in a globalized world"(23). Fu and Matoush note the prevalence of a "fill in the blanks" approach, and suggest that this focus, "plus a lack of teacher preparation and a test-driven orientation" may result in students who score poorly on tests of writing in English and whose writing does not enable them to function as "biliterate lilinguals" (23). Much of this may be the result of differences in the genres and purposes of US composition as compared to ELS in other contexts. Many of these students eventually master the rhetorical challenges inherent in composition course assignments, but also cite the difficulties they experienced in generating 4-6 page essays on a variety of complex topics unrelated to their specific disciplinary interests

or, sometimes, on personal issues, genres with which they are often unfamiliar and which they may view as inappropriate for academic writing.

Most recently, the issue of how to incorporate new media in FYC courses has impacted both curricular and assessment issues. In some classrooms, students construct media based projects that include hypertext elements—blogs, YouTube clips, pictures, interviews, etc. The extent to which new media should be included in a "writing" course and the problem of developing assessment strategies for new media projects have thus raised a number of questions about the purpose of the composition course and about what constitutes an acceptable text that incorporates visual elements (cf Jewitt 2006 etc).

WAC/WiD

The most important issue is whether and how writing supports students' learning and development in a discipline (or more generally). These issues are treated in the next section, on research.

A second recurring issue is that of transfer or boundary crossing of writing knowledge or competence across courses and disciplines—and eventually into workplaces and civic engagements, an issue that has been central to the UK academic literacies approach (refs). A related issue is whether implicit or explicit teaching of writing is more effective, or how they are best combined. In other words, (how) can students learn skills or dispositions in one context that can be used effectively in other contexts (as is assumed in general composition courses)?

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One approach is that students learn to write new genres primarily through writing in authentic contexts, such as their courses in the disciplines. A strong theoretical argument for this view has been made by a group of Canadian researchers, and supported with a long series of qualitative studies that show failure of transfer of genre knowledge from academic to workplace contexts (Dias, Freedman, Medway, Paré, 1999). They theorize that genre knowledge is tacit and only acquired (not consciously learned) as part of some purposeful, communicative activity in the context where a genre is used. Students "pick it up" without being explicitly taught to write in some domain.

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A second approach (Devitt, 2004; Bawarshi, 2003) is to teach "genre awareness" as distinct from (but related to) genre acquisition. Students first rhetorically analyze familiar genres whose contexts they have experienced, then move to less or unfamiliar genres that are related to them (antecedent genres, usually), studying both the form and aspects of the context, always trying to "keep form and context intertwined" (Devitt, 2004 p. 198). Students do research in the target context and its genres. The teacher helps them become good researchers into genre. But the teacher does not teach a specific genre to the students.

A third approach is to teach a genre explicitly, but in the process of performing a rhetorical action in its target context of use—which is the situation in disciplinary classrooms, typically. In the process of doing some discipline-specific learning activity, students also get explicit instruction in genre. But the instruction is not confined to teaching stages or moves or conventions, but also attempts to teach the logic of communication in terms of the logic of the learning/disciplinary activity—the 'why' and

'where' and 'when' of a genre as well as the 'what' and 'how' of it. For example, Carter et al. (2004) provided the first study of effective teaching of a genre to L1 adults using this method in chemistry courses.

Finally, critical pedagogy, emphasizing political/ideological concerns, has been an issue in WAC. Some teachers and theorists have called for WAC to embrace the wider critical pedagogy movement, in various ways (see Bazerman et al., 2005 for a summary). One line of critique and reform calls WID "assimilationist" and emphasizes the importance of valuing students' non-academic language and genres, especially that drawn from ethnic or class backgrounds, which academic genres often exclude (Delpit, 1993; Villanueva, 2001; McCrary, 2001). Another line of critique and reform emphasizes students' individual voice, and questions whether academic discourse in the disciplines provides students with the authority and stance they need to preserve and express a personal voice, to assert their authority over the disciplinary genres—and to resist simply reproducing the dominant ideologies of the disciplines (Thaiss & Zwacki, 2006). These arguments often call for students to write personal or non-academic genres in the disciplinary classrooms.

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Responses to these critiques emphasize 1) that the very power of the disciplines makes it important to understand them—and understanding is a necessary precondition to intelligently critiquing and/or resisting them, 2) that learning new ways of thinking and acting can enrich and expand one's identity, and 3) that critiques of the disciplines from the point of view of the humanities prejudge what students will find most valuable for their ethical and personal development. McLeod & Maimon (2000) argue that WAC

itself is "quietly subversive" as it resists the banking (transmission) model of education and encourages teachers to make students active and critical learners rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Finally, disciplines themselves are not monolithic and each contains critical elements with it, with which WAC can and does engage.

An overarching issue is sustainability. Institutional attitudes and structures militate against WAC: reductive and remedial concepts of student writing (particularly that writing is a set of general skills to be mastered once and for all in the ubiquitous first-year general writing courses); demands on faculty time for research; demands for standardized assessment, as noted above; large enrollments in many courses, and so on (Walvoord, 1997). And because WAC is not a separate curriculum, it is vulnerable to institutional shifts and funding cuts. But because so many academics in the US have been exposed to the idea of WAC—through attending workshops or teaching writing-intensive courses, for example—WAC has become part of the institutional landscape of higher education in North America.

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Current contributions and research

Composition

Composition research continues to proliferate; yet, thus far, no large-scale study has demonstrated definitively that writing instruction will definitively enable students to write effectively at the university or beyond. Moreover, at the present time, an increasing number of English Language Learners (ELL) are flooding American colleges and

universities and the difficulty of helping these students acquire adequate academic literacy has further complicated this goal.

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Increasingly, research that focuses on helping students acquire "genre awareness" (Beaufort, 2007; Devitt, 2004) suggests that enabling students to develop "a metacognitive understanding of genre can help them make connections between the type of writing assigned in a composition course—that is, academic argument—and the writing they encounter in other disciplines" (Clark and Hernandez, 2011, p. 65). Nevertheless, this issue of "transferability" continues to generate scholarly debate. Thais and Zawacki's 2006 study, *Engaged writers, Dynamic Disciplines*, affirms the difficulty of defining academic writing, a perspective that is echoed in Downs and Wardle's 2007 article, "'Mutt Genres' and the Goal of FYC: Can we Help Students write the genres of the University?"

WAC/WiD

***Recent large-scale survey research (NSSE 2008) of more than 23,000 students in 82 universities in the USA found that writing *with certain qualities* contributes significantly to student engagement and learning. The report concluded:

> When institutions provided students with extensive, intellectually challenging writing activities, the students engaged in more deep learning activities such as analysis, synthesis, integration of ideas from various sources, and grappled more with course ideas both in and out of the classroom. In turn, students whose faculty assigned projects with these same characteristics reported greater personal, social,

practical, and academic learning and development (ref?).

It did not find that the amount of writing (number of pages) was significant, but the extensiveness of writing across the students' curriculum and the kinds of intellectual challenge the writing provided (synthesis, analysis, etc.) were significant.

However, research to understand the specific mechanisms of writing to learn, cognitive and/or social, has been more ambiguous. The largest review of research (Klein 1999) suggested that the most promising research studies involved genre. In North America (or do you mean the USA? Is Canada different?) researchers have moved beyond viewing genre in traditional form-based terms, as collections of identifiable features and conventions (e.g., reports, letters, etc.). In the past three decades, new ways of thinking about genre in student writing—growing out of the study of the genre and activity of professionals writing—emphasize the *activity* of genre (Bazerman, 1988; Miller 1984). Genres are "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (Miller 1984, p. 159). The researcher's focus shifts from the text itself to the relationship between the text and the activity of people in situations where texts are used in regularized—typified—ways. Genres are not merely forms of words, but forms of life, socio-cultural regularities that stabilize-for-now (but never finally) our interactions (Schryer, 1993).

In the late 1980s, the concept of genre as social action was combined with Vygotskian cultural-historical activity theory, which sees the relation between thought and language (and learning and writing) in social as well as cognitive terms. (Russell, 2001; Bazerman & Russell, eds 2002). Texts are "attended to in the context of activities" and can only be

studied in their "animating activities"—production, reception, meaning, and value, "embedded in people's uses and interpretations." – texts and practices …

Qualitative studies of student writing have tended to take an activity or social action approach to genre as they describe student writing and students writing and learning. McCarthy's 1987 article "Strangers in Strange Lands" followed one student as he went to courses in four disciplines, and as the title suggests, McCarthy found that the differences in disciplinary writing practices and communities were much more important to the student than the similarities (cf also Lea and Street in the UK).

A large strand of research into the genres and activities of professional and academic research writing began (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). It showed the gaps between student writing and that of professionals.

Research on genre has traced the relationships between academic writing/activity and the writing/activity of other systems, such as home, professions, hobbies, etc. (e.g., Prior, 1998; Russell & Yañez, 2003), and its effects on both writing and identity (see Lea and Stierer for similar accounts in the UK). Genre is seen as offering direction or motive to activity, as well pathways to new identities for participants. Indeed, longitudinal studies of students in higher education in the USA (Beaufort, 2007; Donahue, 2008) have described the genres that students acquire as they learn in the disciplines, within various institutional contexts. And a research literature developed asking what sorts of writing different disciplines assign at different levels and how students understand and

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misunderstand those assignments (Roger)

Future directions

This section highlights the connections between Composition and WAC/WiD, which are, many argue, growing. For the vast majority of those concerned with student writing, as we noted, the two approaches are complimentary and have as their common goal improving students' writing and, with it, their development, intellectual, social, and personal.

Composition and WAC/WiD

Efforts to integrate composition and WAC/WiD are growing, with an increasing realization that not only are both necessary, but also a coordinated effort is necessary. Learning Communities or linked courses provide focused composition instruction to students in a particular discipline or even a specific course. Although WAC/WiD experiments are focusing more on student development through writing in a sequence of courses in a particular curriculum, so that students develop their communication and learning systematically over their time in university, this has proved problematic. The term "discipline" itself is difficult to define, given the burgeoning of new disciplines and sub-disciplines in every field, with different expectations for writing (Thaiss and Zawacki 14). Thus, integrating a composition course or courses into a disciplinary curriculum is an option.

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Issues of "transfer" or "boundary crossing" are important for both composition and WAC/WiD now, with conferences, large research projects, and publications devoted to the problem. One direction is composition courses that focus on "writing about writing"

(Downs & Wardle 2007). Students read and do research on writing in use within all walks of life, on the theory that this raises awareness of writing and encourages boundary crossing. Similarly, composition courses designed to raise students genre awareness have students do discourse analysis and ethnographic research on contexts that they envision entering, both to understand the writing practices in them and to develop a general capacity to "read" the genres of any organization (Devitt 2004).

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Many composition programs are now including or even emphasizing new media genres as forms of academic writing. However, a concern that is becoming more important is the extent to which different new media genres should substitute for the more traditional essay, or whether the "genre" of academic writing will be useful to students when they write papers in upper level discipline based courses or assume a professional role. WAC/WiD is also focusing attention on other media, to produce communication across the curriculum (CxC) or in the disciplines (CiD). The multi-modal communication competencies that students need have become the specific focus of many programs (Dannels 2001).

Online learning is now providing new opportunities for both composition and WAC/WiD, such as online peer review systems (Hart-Davidson, McLeod, Klerkx & Wojcik 2010), online tutorials on discipline-specific genres (Carter et al 2004), and online multi-media case studies that integrate communication experiences into the experience of the case (Fisher 2007). A great deal of effort in pedagogy and research surrounds computers and writing, with a journal, *Computers and Composition*, and an annual conference (of the same name) dedicated to it.

Finally, globalization or "transnational composition," as it is sometimes called, is growing dramatically in importance. This includes issues of second/other language writing of both foreign/overseas students and immigrants and their children. But it goes further to include issues of language policy and the role of English in global academic and professional work (Donahue 2009). WAC/WiD has continued to grow in North America, and in the last decade influenced [and been itself influenced by?] many experiments on other continents, notably Europe and South America (Russell et al 2009). Australia has had an indigenous WiD effort for the last 20 years (Skillen 2008). The comparatively long and large tradition of writing teaching and research in the US and, to a lesser extent, Canada, is having an influence in other regions and systems where writing is becoming an issue in higher education.

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Commented [B35]: or, the USA position can now be seen as one element in a larger international movement ...

Nice coverage of an important tradition with clear summaries of key issues. Now need to make the link to English Language Studies and to international work (not just how USA 'influenced' this but more cross referencing!). The links to English are especially important given the theme of the Handbook volume. And it would be helpful to include some more detail on the burgeoning work in France, which Russell is closely involved with, and in the UK and maybe spell out the Canada and Australia movements more so that the chapter has an international framing.

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Editors also need to cross reference with Horner's chapter on WAC/WiD.

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